

SKIN INFECTIONS.—Cutaneous infections are very common in certain regions, a fact already recorded by Exquemelin (French ed.: II, 277), who visited the Miskito of Cabo Gracias a Dios; they are the result of ignorance of the most elementary principles of hygiene.

A certain skin disease, which starts by a burning or swelling of flesh, is said to be caused by the urine of an insect, which, like the disease itself, is called *mustukra* by the Miskito. [153]

A specific ulcer, resembling cancer, and known locally by the name "bay-sore" (M.: *laca kreñiss* "the devil is boring"; S.: *pilau, tamak*), is sometimes caught by Indians and Negroes. It breaks out on face, arms, and legs, and is generally attended with very acute pain. It is cured by powerful caustics, or applications of a corrosive nature. The common ulcer, abscess, or carbuncle is called *yukri* (M.) and *sura* (S.).

Various other bad skin diseases may be found in certain regions; they are known by various names (M.: *yats, kikiiklis, kuswa-duya*; S.: *una*).

A cutaneous affection, sometimes taken for leprosy (which is rarely met with), is very common among both tribes. It is known by the names *bulpis* among the Miskito and *mara* among the Sumu; the Spanish-speaking Central Americans call it "bienteveo," "carate," and "mal del pinto." It occurs in white, red, and black blotches; for that reason the Ladinos refer derisively as *pente pintada* "painted people" to the ones afflicted with this disease.

Ringworm (M.: *sus, siki, bulpis twaknira*; S.: *mara pda, mara titir*) is also met with among the Indians. Small warts (M.: *sirama*; S.: *titimak*) also occur on the hands.

Painful sores may also be caused by the jiggers or chigoes (*Sarcoptes penetrans*), a sort of flea, which is very common during the dry season but disappears gradually at the beginning of the rainy period. This insect lives on the ground and is especially common around the dwellings where pigs are allowed to roam. It burrows itself under the skin and toenails of man and animal to deposit its eggs. If the latter be taken out immediately with a disinfected needle or the point of a knife, the wound will heal without further care.

Minute ticks cover every bush during the dry season. They fix themselves to the body of man and animal and bury their head in the skin. Sometimes they cause painful inflammations.

YUMU, OR STOMACH ACHES.—This state of ill being is very common among the Miskito and appears to be merely some sort of indigestion due to overeating. The Indians believe that it is caused by the spirit of an animal which has entered the body of the sick person. This may have taken place by eating a piece of the animal in question, or by being scared at the sudden appearance thereof, while being out in the bush. Thus if the agouti (*kyaki*) has caused the ill the latter

164 will be known as *kyaki yumu-ka*. The Sumu have apparently taken
 753 this belief from the Miskito, and they have no distinctive name for
 the ill; the Ramo of Nicaragua call it *yakuti*.

755 The *sukya* cures this illness after its source has been revealed to
 him in dreams, for the treatment differs slightly according to various
 animals which have caused it. But in all cases the belly of the patient
 is strongly massaged with animal grease (also vaseline, coconut oil),
 while the *sukya* keeps on continually a low whistle in order to induce
 the spirit to depart. Among the Christianized Miskito there are also
 some people who heal *yumu* by similar methods; they are known as
yumu yabaka uplika "people curing *yumu*."²

Women *enciente* may occasionally suffer from *kwiara yumu-ka*
 "pregnancy *yumu*"; the child is supposed to die then invariably,
 unless the *sukya* applies a treatment.

164 OTHER INDIGENOUS DISEASES.—Dysentery (M.: *taldura*; S.:
 751 *bo-pau*) occasionally appears in the form of an epidemic; it is generally
 cured by the administration of an infusion from the bark of the
 nance tree (*Byrsonima crassifolia* H. B. K.).

To cure diarrhea (M.: *byara plapaya*; T., P. *...*; U.: *bawas lanaka*), the favorite remedy is an infusion prepared by boiling the
 bark of the mountain guava tree or the seed of the *...* or monkey
 apple. The Sumu also boil the rootstock (M.: *laka*; S.: *sara*) of the
 black or Ulva banana.

According to the investigations carried on by the Rockefeller
 Foundation, hookworm is found on about 75 per cent of the Indian
 population living around Matagalpa. There is no doubt that it is
 also common among the Indians of the Mosquito Coast. Hookworm
 is seldom fatal, but there is progressive anemia and frequently inter-
 ference with mental and physical development, causing occasionally
 premature death.

Children especially seem to be infected with intestinal parasites,
 as may be seen from their color and their enormously swollen belly;
 this is largely due to their habit of eating earth, charcoal, and the
 like.

164 Rheumatism (M.: *kyoia lāwaya*, *dusa lāwaya*; S.: *wakal dalanin*,
 753 *wakal dalanaka*) is supposed to be caused by thorns or fishbones
 755 which have been introduced into the flesh by evil spirits. The *sukya*
 pinches and kneads the afflicted spot, then makes a small incision
 with a glass splinter and, applying his mouth to the wound, he sucks
 a little and finally produces a prickle or bone, which he had carefully
 hidden between his teeth.

² Zlock (102) gives *yumuk* as the Miskito name for a native doctor curing with
 medicines. In the Carib dialects of Surinam and adjacent regions *yumu* is the
 name for some sort of spirit.

[i.e. *yumu*, or stomachache, see cat. 116, pp. 114-20—Analyst]

wood or hombre grande (S.: *wanabaka*) is said to be efficacious in case of snake bites. 278

The woody rootstock of the China root or cuculmeca, a sort of French brier (S.: *camelfi*, *wacalanaka*) is boiled in water and the decoction is used to clean the blood, and as a preventive against snake bites.

The small "beans" contained in the pod of the pissabed or frijolillo shrub (M.: *sitsisanya*) are toasted, ground, and used as coffee on account of their diuretic properties; the root of this plant is employed in malarial fever.

The large round leaves of the cowfoot or Santa Maria bush (M.: *sikulara*; S.: *kalamata*) enter into poultices for a swelling of the flesh, while spider webs are applied to wounds in order to stop bleeding. Wild honey is also used in medicine.

PRESUMED CAUSE OF DISEASES.—The cure of the sick is practically always left to the sukya; the latter is generally a clever herbalist, and the treatment applied by him is often excellent, but the remedy in itself is considered of no avail unless certain rites are observed by the healer as well as by the patient. 756

According to these primitive people, indigenous diseases and accidents are always due to the agency of some evil spirit (M.: *lasa*; T., P.: *walase*; U.: *newel*) under whose power the sick person is supposed to be. The mischief-maker may send a snake or a jaguar to harm the intended victim, or cause a tree to fall upon him, or cause his canoe to upset, or bring about some other calamity and ill luck. Thus toothache is supposed to be caused by a worm (M.: *sukri*, *sisi*) that has been sent by these evil powers to bore the tooth. People walking in their sleep are said to be possessed by demons. Epilepsy is also caused by the temporary possession of the individual by such evil spirits; hence fits are called by the Miskito *wlase prukaya* "to be beaten by the devil." For the cure of this disease a decoction prepared from the *kiasuri* herb is said to be very efficacious. 753

This evil influence may be counteracted through the agency of the sukya who manages to exorcise the spirit from the sick and then brings about a complete cure.

DIAGNOSIS.—Through the use of narcotics, especially the excessive use of tobacco, the sukya throws himself in a condition of wild ecstasy, and goes into trances and hypnotic states. During such an abnormal condition he is supposed to be in relation with friendly spirits whom he had invoked previously, and who reveal to him the source of the illness and the mode of cure. 756

HEALER'S INSIGNIA.—The insignia or kickshaws of a sukya during a cure are three or four black hardwood sticks with carved heads and several magic stones and dolls or manikins of white tunu cloth. Stone axes, which are regarded as thunderbolts, figure also among the

278 Camotillo is the Spanish name for a tuberous plant, said to be not unlike the sweetpotato vine. It is supposed to grow in a wild state in certain regions of the Mosquito Coast, in the neighborhood of the rivers, but it is known only to few persons. The tuber is dried in the sun and reduced to a fine powder by a very laborious process. After pulverization it is introduced into the food or drink of the intended victim. Death will set in after exactly as many days as the tuber in question had been extracted from the soil at the time of administration.

The Ladinos believe that many Miskito and Sumu are acquainted with this manner of disposing of an enemy, but I was unable to obtain from these Indians any reliable details pertaining to the plant. All my Indian informants denied knowing it. In 1919 the candidates for president and vice president of Honduras died several months previous to the election, and the ignorant people of that Republic ascribed their deaths to the administration of camotillo by adherents of the rival political party.

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754 WITCH POISON.—Many Indians believe that poison can be wafted through the air to the intended victim. The fear of "buried poison" has been introduced among the Miskito by Negroes from British Honduras and Jamaica, who have settled at the coast. In fact the Miskito of Rio Coco and Honduras nowadays ascribe disease not so much to the mischief of evil spirits as to the presence of buried poison in the neighborhood of the sick person's house. This poison is supposed to have been hidden there by one of his enemies with the object of causing him to fall into some lingering disease, as dysentery, and eventually to die. Such poison, which is generally inclosed in a bottle, is said to soak through the cork, spread to the surface, and then cause disease to all the people in the neighborhood.

755 When after the administration of different remedies there is no improvement in the condition of a sick person, a "poison doctor," that is, a sukya skilled in the discovery of such witch poison, is called. The latter, upon his arrival, takes a little walk around the house, and then pretends to smell buried poison in the neighborhood. He promises to take it out if everyone in the settlement will give him a small amount of money. As the presumed bad effects of such buried poison will gradually spread to the whole village, everyone will pay his share, and the following day the sorcerer promises to do the needful. In the meantime, generally during the night, he buries a small flask of a dark liquid near the house of the sick person. In the morning the entire population of the village is present in order to witness the extraction of the source of the illness. After searching the vicinity of the house for a considerable time the sukya finally walks to the spot where he buried the small bottle during the night, and then triumphantly shouts: *Nara sa* "Here it is." He shows the